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de Vosjoli, Philippe  
Thyraud  
Foccart, Jacques  
P-Uris, Leon

# FRANCE:

## Stranger Than Fiction

When Leon Uris's best-selling novel "Topaz" first appeared on the literary scene last year it served, not too surprisingly, to enliven cocktail gossip all along Washington's Embassy Row. So thinly disguised were certain of the book's characters (Gen. Pierre La Croix, for example, was a dead ringer for Charles de Gaulle) that the intriguing question arose as to just how much of the novel was indeed purely fictional. The verdict offered at that time by Washington insiders was that although the characters might be authentic, the plot—

concerning the unmasking, during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, of a Soviet spy within the French President's innermost circle—was most assuredly a work of the imagination.

Or was it? In a highly personal account appearing exclusively this week in Life and London's Sunday Times, a former French intelligence agent named Philippe Thyraud de Vosjoli relates a purportedly real-life spy story that sounds as though it came straight out of the pages of "Topaz." De Vosjoli, who was attached to the French Embassy in Washington from 1950 to 1963, describes the exhaustive "debriefing" of a Soviet agent who defected to the West. The defector, says de Vosjoli, offered convincing evidence that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was so riddled with Soviet agents that Moscow could lay its hands on any secret NATO document within 48 hours. What's more, the Russian provided the even more astounding disclosure that one of President de Gaulle's most trusted advisers at the Elysée Palace was, in fact, a French-

man long in the Kremlin's secret employ. (This revelation, it is alleged, was responsible for blowing the "covers" of some 200 widely scattered Soviet agents, including Britain's "Kim" Philby—the master spy now a permanent resident in Moscow.)

'Defection': This chilling information, according to de Vosjoli, was brought to the attention of President John F. Kennedy, who, in turn, sent de Gaulle a handwritten letter informing him that a spy had infiltrated the French leader's close entourage. But, according to de Vosjoli, this warning went virtually unheeded by de Gaulle as did similar urgent warnings sent back to Paris by French intelligence men. Instead, de Vosjoli claims he was ordered to sever his friendly ties with the CIA and organize a "clandestine intelligence network in the U.S." for the purpose of ferreting out nuclear secrets. At that, de Vosjoli resigned from the French secret service and "defected" to the U.S. Subsequently, the small (5-foot-8), baldish de Vosjoli, who now resides in Florida, met author Uris on a trip to Mexico.

For his part, Uris, when asked whether he patterned his book after de Vosjoli's story, would only say last week that he was "taking the Fifth Amendment." Nor would he confirm whether his denouement in "Topaz"—Moscow's man in the Elysée is unmasked at the end—is simply literary license. For the fact is that de Vosjoli himself does not even intimate that he knows the alleged spy's identity—though he believes he may still be operating at the Elysée.

Last week, on the eve of the publication of de Vosjoli's memoirs, the French satirical weekly Le Canard Enchaîné jumped into the act by disclosing—presumably with tongue in cheek—that the real-life "Topaz" agent was none other than Jacques Foccart, 54, an enigmatic Gaullist who coordinates all of France's intelligence activities. So patently absurd did this seem in France, where Foccart is widely known as a fervently loyal follower of de Gaulle, that de Vosjoli's story was disdainfully dismissed as nonsense at best, or even a heavy-handed Anglo-Saxon plot to embarrass the French President. As for de Vosjoli himself, French officials were ready enough to give him good marks for his performance as a veteran secret agent—at least up until the time when he became too chummy with the CIA. "The trouble with de Vosjoli," one Paris official explained with a Gallic shrug last week, "was simply that he was in Washington too long."